ForeWord Reviews

SELF-HELP

My Father, My Self
Masa Aiba Goetz
Element Books
978-1-86204-348-0
(June 1998)

My Father, My Self is a seeming no-brainer: Children need good fathers. Yet, as author Masa Aiba Goetz notes, it wasn't long ago that society regarded fathers as peripheral to the intellectual, emotional and spiritual development of their offspring. Being a good dad meant holding down a decent job and providing the material necessities: food, clothes, and shelter. Mom got the credit — or blame — for the kids' character.

But one need not be a Dan Quayle, wagging a finger at Murphy Brown, to acknowledge that the best mother in the world cannot obviate the need for a caring, engaged father. The reason, Goetz tells us, is that men and women simply don't approach parenting the same way.

"Whatever the quality of the relationship between you and your dad, it forms an emotional foundation that pervades your entire life" in such crucial areas as self-esteem, sexual identity, marriage and professional achievement.

Goetz is a San Diego psychologist who specializes in relationships, marriage and family counseling. Her book serves as something of a therapy session on paper for people whose experiences with their dads were less than ideal. Each chapter explores a different aspect of fatherhood and illustrates the writer's points with anecdotes drawn from interviews with some 200 people. Eventually these real-life stories become repetitive. Yet they're particularly helpful when the speakers not only unload emotional baggage, but also relate how they healed long-festering wounds and moved forward.

Goetz includes plenty of self-help tips and concludes with a "path to healing" guide. Some readers may find the exercises a bit hokey ("… imagine a ball of golden energy surrounding you and filling you with a deep sense of well-being."). Yet anyone struggling to overcome the pain of an unhappy life with father should find this book a helpful step on the path to reconciliation.

John Flesher